

Consanguinity and possession

in varieties of Dutch

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Abstract

Southern varieties of Dutch use the 1PL possessive pronoun *ons* as a marker of consanguinity with proper names, e.g. *ons Emma* ‘Emma, our consanguineous family member’. This use of *ons* ‘our’ has some remarkable properties: it is incompatible with adjectival modification and contrastive stress. These properties are shared with a construction from Standard Dutch: complex prenominal s-possessors consisting of the 1SG possessive pronoun and a kinship term as in *mijn vaders fiets* ‘my father’s bike’. We propose that both these constructions are manifestations of a constructional idiom (Booij 2002), a lexical template with a variable part. This offers a straightforward account of the properties of these constructions.

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1. Introduction

Many Southern varieties of Dutch¹, like Brabant Dutch and Limburgian, display a remarkable phenomenon with respect to the expression of kinship relations.

Speakers of these varieties use the 1PL possessive pronoun *ons* ‘our’ as a marker that signals kinship relations. More specifically, a combination of *ons* ‘our’ and a proper name signals that the bearer of the name is part of the speaker’s family.²

A speaker who uses (1a) and (1b), conveys that Emma and Filip are part of their family.³

- (1) PROPER NAMES OF FAMILY MEMBERS
- a. ons Emma [Brabant Dutch]
our Emma
'Emma, our family member'

¹ It is also found in Frisian.

² As we will see below, *ons* 'our' might in some dialects signal a more restrictive relation than a family relation, while in other dialects it expresses a less restrictive relation.

³ If the possessive pronoun receives contrastive stress (1b) has a contrastive interpretation on which Filip is not necessarily a family member of the speaker. We will come back to this interpretation below. With a neutral intonation, however, only the family member interpretation is possible.

- (3) a. Jan-**s** fiets [Standard Dutch]
John-POSS bike
'John's bike'
- b. *De oude burgemeester-**s** fiets
The old mayor-POSS bike
'The old mayor's bike'
- c. mijn vader-**s** fiets
my father-POSS bike
'my father's bike'

Just like *ons* 'our' in (2), *mijn* in (3c) cannot be followed by an adjective, as shown in (4).

- (4) *Mijn oude vader-**s** fiets [Standard Dutch]
My old father-POSS bike
'my old father's bike'

The complex prenominal *-s* possessors in Standard Dutch and the dialectal family relation marker *ons* 'our' are thus both incompatible with adjectival modification. In this paper, we argue that this is the case because both constructions are instances of what we call constructional idioms: that is, lexical constructions with a variable part. This means that we claim that *ons* 'our' in (1) and *mijn* 'my' in (3c) are not combined at the syntactic level with the proper names and the kinship terms that follow them, but enter the syntactic component of the grammar as an atomic unit. We will show that this accounts for

their incompatibility with adjectival modification, as well as for a range of other properties.

The structure of this article is as follows: In section 2, we will first introduce the properties of the use of *ons* 'our' as a marker of family relations with proper names in Dutch dialects. We will then introduce our constructional idiom analysis and show how it accounts for these properties. Subsequently, we will take in section 3 a look at the use of *ons* 'our' with kinship terms in the same dialects. We will show that this use needs to be analyzed along the same lines as the use with proper names. Finally, we will examine in section 4 prenominal –s possessors in Standard Dutch. We will argue that the complex –s possessor in (3c) also needs be analyzed as the family relation marker *ons* 'our'. Besides accounting for a number of other properties, this offers a straightforward explanation of the observation that combinations of *my* and a kinship term appear to be an exception of the rule that only head-like elements can be used as prenominal –s possessors in Dutch.

2. *Ons* 'our' and proper names

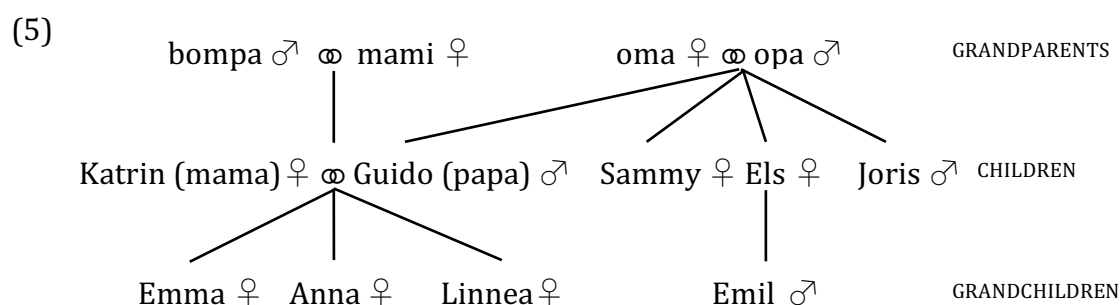
As discussed above, Southern varieties of Dutch, like Brabant Dutch and Limburgian, use *ons* 'our' with proper names to signal a family relation between the speaker and the bearer of the proper name. See for instance the examples in (1) above. This use of *ons* 'our' has a number of particular properties that we will discuss in detail in the following sections.

2.1. Meaning contribution

We stated above that *ons* ‘our’ signals family membership. This is a bit of an oversimplification. There are indeed dialects that use *ons* ‘our’ only for family memberships including for spouses and in-laws. This is for example the case for the Brabantic dialects spoken in the area west of Brussels.

Other dialects might be more or less restrictive in this respect. The Northern Brabantic dialect spoken in the Dutch town of Vught is an example of a less restrictive dialect. Kroon (2015) shows that the younger speakers of this dialect do not only use *ons* ‘our’ with proper names of family members, but also with those of close friends.

The Brabantic varieties spoken in Brussels and the neighboring areas to the North and East are examples of more restrictive dialects. In these dialects, *ons* ‘our’ can only introduce blood relatives of the speaker. Relatives that are part of the family of the speaker through marriage (e.g. spouses and in-laws) cannot be introduced by *ons* ‘our’. In order to appreciate this, consider the family tree in (5).



As illustrated in (6), Speaker Katrin can, for instance, use *ons* ‘our’ in combination with her daughters Emma and Anna and her father, all of whom are

blood relatives. The examples in (6), however, also show that Katrin cannot use *ons* ‘our’ with all the members of her family. For instance, she cannot use *ons* ‘our’ in combination with her husband Guido or her sister-in-law Sammy. This shows that Katrin cannot use *ons* ‘our’ to refer to those family members who are related to her by marriage.

- (6) SPEAKER KATRIN: [Brabant Dutch]
- ons* Emma, *ons* Anna, *onzen* bompa
our Emma, *our* Anna, *our* grandfather
 * *onze* Guido, * *ons* oma, * *ons* tante Sammy, * *onzen* Emil
our Guido, *our* grandmother, *our* aunt Sammy, *our* Emil

Contrary to her mother, speaker Emma is a blood relative of everyone who is represented in the family tree in (5). She can use *ons* ‘our’ in combination with anyone in (5), as is illustrated by the examples in (7).

- (7) SPEAKER EMMA: [Brabant Dutch]
- ons* Anna, *onzen* Bompa, *onze* papa, *ons* mama,
our Anna, *our* grandfather, *our* father, *our* mother
ons oma, *ons* tante Sammy, *onzen* Emil
our grandmother, *our* aunt Sammy, *our* Emil

We therefore conclude that *ons* ‘our’ in these dialects can function as a marker that signals relations between blood relatives. We will therefore call *ons* ‘our’ a marker of consanguineous possession in these dialects. In the remainder of this

paper, we will focus on dialects with consanguineous *ons* 'our'. However, the account that we will develop is flexible enough to also be applied to the less restrictive dialects, as we will show in section 2.3.1. below.

2.2. Other properties

In addition to the semantics outlined above, consanguineous *ons* 'our' has a number of other unusual properties.

First of all, consanguineous *ons* cannot receive contrastive stress, as shown in (8).⁵

- (8) *ONS Emma is veel slimmer, dan JULLIE Griet! [Brabant Dutch]
 Our Emma is way smarter than your Griet
 'Emma, our consanguineous kin member, is way smarter than your
 Griet'

This incompatibility between consanguineous *ons* 'our' and contrastive stress is not the result of a more general incompatibility between 1P possessive pronouns and contrastive stress. In the relevant dialects, *ons* 'our' is not only used as a marker of consanguinity or family membership, but it can also be used as a regular 1P possessive marker. On this use, it can carry contrastive stress as in (9).

- (9) ONS huis is groter dan JULLIE huis! [Brabant Dutch]
 our house is bigger than your.PL house

⁵ We will indicate contrastive stress through means of capitalization.

‘Our house is bigger than your house!’

Proper names are not only compatible with the consanguineous use *ons* ‘our’, but also with its normal possessive use. It is possible to combine a proper name with *ons* ‘our’ carrying contrastive stress. In that case *ons* ‘our’ can only be interpreted as the regular possessive, not as the consanguinity marker. We illustrate this with the example in (10). In this example, Emma is not necessarily a consanguineous kin member, but instead she can be a member of any group that can be marked as ours. So Emma in (10) could belong to our class, our softball team, our friends, our colleagues, etc.⁶

⁶ The careful reader might have noticed that, besides contrastive stress, there is another difference between possessive *ons* ‘our’ in (10) and the use of *ons* ‘our’ as a consanguinity marker like in (1a), repeated here in (i).

- (i) *Ons* Emma
 Our Emma
 ‘Emma, our consanguineous kin member’

The form of *ons* is different in the two cases. In (10), *ons* ends in *-e*, *onze*, pronounced as a schwa. In (i) this *-e* is absent. In standard Dutch, the *-e* in *onze* is normally considered to be a marker that signals agreement with the noun that follows it, see e.g. Haeseryn (1997: §5.5.4 & 5.5.5.1). On the basis of this, one might be inclined to think that the dialects under investigation feature separate agreement paradigms for the consanguineous use of *ons* ‘our’ and its regular possessive use. However, this is not the case. In the relevant dialects, feminine nouns that are neither proper names nor kinship terms, like for instance *tafel* ‘table’, also display an alternation between *ons/onze*, see (ii).

- (ii) a. **Ons** tafel is kapot. b. **ONZE** tafel is groter dan die van ULLE!
 Our table is broken Our table is bigger than that of your.PL
 ‘Our table is broken.’ ‘Our table is bigger than yours!’

The alternation in (ii) is similar to the contrast between (i) and (10). It cannot, however, be due to a separate agreement pattern for consanguineous *ons*, since consanguinity is not a meaning component that can be attributed to a table. The factor that determines the choice between *ons/onze* with feminine nouns in the relevant dialects seems to be prosodic prominence. If *ons* is prosodically prominent, as is the case if it carries contrastive stress, it must be realized as *onze*. In other cases, it is realized as *ons*.

- (10) JOUW Emma komt, maar ONZE Emma niet. [Brabant Dutch]
Your Emma comes, but our Emma not.
'Your Emma will be coming, but our Emma won't'

In the introduction, we already discussed another property of the family/consanguinity marker *ons* 'our': its incompatibility with productive adjectival modification as shown in (11).

- (11) a. ons (*slimme) Emma (=2)) b. onze (*doortastende) Guido
our smart Emma our forceful Guido
- [Brabant Dutch]

The unacceptability of the adjective in (11) has its source in the presence of consanguineous *ons* 'our'. It is not due to an incompatibility between normal productive adjectival modification and proper names. This is shown by the observation that the same adjectives can modify the same names in (12), without giving rise to unacceptability.

- (12) a. die slimme Emma
 that smart Emma
 ‘that smart Emma’
- b. die doortastende Guido
 that forceful Guido
 ‘that forceful Guido’
- [Brabant Dutch]

We propose an analysis of consanguineous *ons* that will straightforwardly account for these properties.

2.3. Analysis: Consanguineous *ons* as a constructional idiom

As pointed out above, *ons* ‘our’ also functions as the regular 1PL possessive pronoun. In case the regular 1PL possessive *ons* ‘our’ combines syntactically with a common noun like *huis* ‘house’, the resulting phrase *ons huis* ‘our house’ means something like ‘the house that is in a possessive relation with a group that includes the speaker’. The possessive pronoun thus introduces a possessive relation. The semantic nature of this possessive relation is rather flexible. *Ons huis* ‘our house’ might be the house that we designed, or built, own, live in, or the one we painted, etc. Depending on the context, different interpretations of the possessive relation are possible. In order to account for this flexibility, Barker (1995) proposes that the possessive relation denotes an underspecified relation *R* whose exact nature is filled in by the context of the utterance it appears in. Using this relation *R*, the interpretation of the regular possessive phrase *ons huis* ‘our house’ formally corresponds to (33), in which the iota operator encodes definiteness (i.e. an exhaustively identified specific individual).

$$(13) \quad \iota x.\text{house}(x) \wedge R(x, [\text{1PL}])$$

By contrast, when *ons* ‘our’ is used as a consanguineous marker with a proper name, it is not the case that the individual denoted by the proper name is in some possessive relation that needs to be filled in by the context. Rather, this relation

not fixed. Instead, it can be any first name. Booij (2002: 302) calls such a syntactic expression with non-compositional meaning of which only a part is fixed a *constructional idiom*, following work by Langacker (1987), Jackendoff (1995, 1997, 2000, 2001) and work done in construction grammar (Goldberg 1995; Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor 1988 among others). We propose that the combination of consanguineous *ons* 'our' and a proper name is a constructional idiom in this sense. Following Booij (2002) and work cited therein, we take constructional idioms to be stored in the lexicon as a fixed expression, i.e. a lexical template, that has a variable part and that is associated with its own (often non-compositional) meaning. The variable part of the expression in the relevant case of consanguineous *ons* 'our' is the first name following *ons*. Consanguinity is part of the meaning associated with the constructional idiom as a whole. Since consanguinity is only represented at the level of the entire constructional idiom, it need not be traceable to any of its parts. The syntactic and the semantic properties of the constructional idiom that is at the basis of instances of consanguineous *ons* 'our' have been schematized in (15).

- (15) Syntax: [_{DP} *ons* Y] where Y = any first name
- Meaning: $\lambda x.[Y(x) \wedge \text{consanguinous_kin}(x, \llbracket 1_{PL} \rrbracket)]$
- 'the unique individual who bears the proper name Y
 and who is in a consanguinity relation with a plural
 entity that includes the speaker'

The constructional idiom in (15) accounts for those dialects in which *ons* ‘our’ in the context of a proper name signals a consanguinity relation. In section 2.1. above, we noticed that there is dialectal variation with respect to what this use of *ons* ‘our’ marks. There are dialects, like the varieties spoken West of Brussels, in which it signals all family relations, including non-consanguineous ones. There are also dialects in which it marks membership of a peer group, like in Vught Dutch. These dialects have constructional idioms that are minimally different from the one in (15). The sole aspect in which they are different is that the consanguineous kin relation that is part of the meaning of the constructional idiom is replaced either by a general family relation or a peer group membership relation. Since the constructional idioms in these dialects are identical with respect to all other properties, we will continue to exclusively focus below on the consanguineous *ons* dialects.

Above, we identified two remarkable properties of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’. We will now show how our analysis accounts for them.

2.4. Accounting for the properties of consanguineous ‘ons’

Above we discussed two peculiar properties of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ constructions. One of these properties is that names that are introduced by consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ resist productive adjectival modification, (16).

- | | | | | | |
|------|-----|------------|------|--|-----------------|
| (16) | ons | (* slimme) | Emma | | [Brabant Dutch] |
| | our | smart | Emma | | (=(11a)) |

The unacceptability of the utterance in (16) is straightforwardly accounted for by our proposal. As explained by Booij (2002), parts of constructional idioms resist modification because they do not syntactically project in the usual manner. The reason for this is that the parts of a constructional idiom do not combine in the syntactic component. Instead, the constructional idiom corresponds to a lexical template that is stored in the lexicon. The variable part of that template is specified by the lexical component of the grammar prior to insertion of the constructional idiom in syntax. The constructional idiom is thus formed in the lexical component and will therefore behave as a single atomic syntactic unit. Modification of a noun by an adjective is a syntactic process. Given that the entire constructional idiom is an atomic syntactic unit, modification of its parts is impossible. So in order to derive (14a), that is (16) without the adjective, the first name *Emma* replaces in the lexical component of the grammar the variable Y in the lexical template in (15). This results in the syntactic unit [_{DP} *ons Emma*] that, although it consists of two words, is syntactically atomic in that it doesn't have an internal syntactic structure. Given the absence of this structure, it is impossible to perform syntactic modification of its composing parts. This explains the unacceptability of adjective *slimme* 'smart' in (16).⁷

This renders combinations of consanguineous *ons* 'our' and a proper name akin to other complex elements that are stored in the lexical component instead of being derived in the syntactic component. Noun-noun compounds are a case at hand. Crucially, such other complex lexical items also do not allow their nominal

⁷ One of the reviewers pointed out that our account predicts that, if a modifier is part of a proper name, that modifier should be able to follow consanguineous *ons* 'our' as part of that name. This prediction is indeed borne out. If somebody's (nick)name is *Zotte Griet* ('Mad Griet'), then blood relatives can refer to this person using the consanguineous *ons* 'our' (construction): *Ons Zotte Griet* ('our blood relative Mad Griet').

subparts to be productively modified by an adjective.⁸ For instance, the adjectives in (17) can only modify the entire compound, but not the first nominal part of the compounds.

- | | | | |
|---------|--------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| (17) a. | small football | b. | grote autoverkoper [Dutch] |
| | ‘a football that is small’ | | large car.salesman |
| | NOT: ‘a ball for a small foot’ | | ‘a car salesman who is large’ |
| | | | NOT: ‘a man who sells large cars’ |

This parallel with adjectival modification between compounds and consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ confirms our lexical treatment of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’.

The other peculiar property of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ we introduced above is its incompatibility with contrastive stress despite that *ons* ‘our’ is compatible with contrastive stress on other uses. This incompatibility has been shown in (8), repeated here in (18).

- (18) *ONS Emma is veel slimmer, dan JULLIE Griet! [Brabant Dutch]
- Our Emma is way smarter than your Griet

⁸ As mentioned by a reviewer, non-productive adjectival modification of member of a compound is possible. The adjective *gebruikte* ‘used’ in (i) only modifies the first part of the N-N compound, *auto* ‘car’.

- (i) gebruikte autoverkoper
 used car.salesman
 ‘a salesman who sells used cars’.

This pattern is, however, not productive, as the contrast with (17b) shows. The reason for this is that *gebruikte auto* ‘used car’ is a fixed expression. It is therefore of a lexical nature and can hence feed into lexical processes like compounding.

‘Emma, our consanguineous kin member, is way smarter than your
Griet’

This property also follows straightforwardly from our proposal that consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ is part of a constructional idiom. In order for an element to receive contrastive stress it needs to have an independent meaning. Otherwise it is impossible to contrast its meaning with the meaning of something else. On our proposal, the consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ is part of the lexical template in (15) above. This template is stored in the lexicon with its associated meaning. Crucially, this meaning is a property of the whole template rather than of its parts. This means that the *ons*-part of the constructional idiom doesn’t carry any meaning of its own at any level of representation.⁹ As a result, it is impossible to put contrastive stress on *ons* ‘our’: it cannot be contrasted since it has no meaning of its own.

Above, we have shown that our constructional idiom approach accounts for three properties of combinations of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ and proper names: its non-compositional meaning, its ban on productive adjectival modification, and the impossibility to contrastively stress *ons* ‘our’ on its consanguineous use. We will now turn to another construction in the same dialects that combines *ons* with a kinship term. We will show that this construction needs to be analyzed along the same lines as combinations of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ and proper names.

⁹ Of course, the historical origin of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ is the normal possessive *ons* ‘our’ which is associated with its own meaning. However, as soon it got reanalyzed as consanguineous *ons*, this meaning got transferred to the meaning of the constructional idiom. This meaning doesn’t only include the meaning of possessive *ons*, but also the consanguinity aspect.

3. Consanguineous *ons* and kinship terms

In the previous section, we examined combinations of *ons* ‘our’ in some Southern Dutch dialects. In the same dialects, it is also possible to combine kinship terms with *ons* ‘our’, as in (19).

- (19) KINSHIP TERMS
- | | | | | |
|----|---------------------|----|-----------------|-----------------|
| a. | ons vader | b. | ons moeder/mama | [Brabant Dutch] |
| | our father | | our mother/mom | |
| c. | ons mami | c. | onzen bompa | |
| | our grandmother | | our grandfather | |
| d. | ons zus/dochter | e. | ons broer | |
| | our sister/daughter | | our brother | |

Like the cases in which *ons* ‘our’ combines with a proper name, these expressions express a consanguinity relation with the speaker. At first sight, one might not be inclined to analyze these cases along the same lines as *ons* ‘our’ + proper name. After all, the lexical meanings of the kinship terms already entail the existence of a consanguinity relation. Somebody only is a father/sister/brother/son/etc. by virtue of the existence of a consanguinity relation with somebody else. The consanguinity meaning component can thus be traced back to the kinship name. It is therefore not as clearly non-

compositional as the combination *ons* ‘our’ + proper name. An analysis as a constructional idiom is therefore not self-evident.

Nevertheless, we argue that combinations of *ons* ‘our’ and kinship terms of the type in (19) should be analyzed as instances of a constructional idiom similar to the one in (15) above. The reason for this is that they share two properties with combinations of consanguineous *ons* ‘our’ and a proper name, despite the fact that the consanguinity meaning looks compositional in (19). These two properties are the impossibility to productively modify the kinship term with an adjective, as illustrated in (20), and the impossibility to contrastively stress *ons* ‘our’, (21).

- (20) a. *ons* (*oude) vader b. *ons* (*goede) moeder [Brabant Dutch]
 our old father our good mother

- (21) *ONS mama is veel slimmer, dan JULLIE mama!¹⁰ [Brabant Dutch]
 Our mommy is way smarter than your mommy
 ‘Our mommy is way smarter than yours’

As noted above *ons* ‘our’ on its normal (non-consanguineous) use can readily receive contrastive stress. In addition, kinship terms can generally be modified by adjectives if they are introduced by a possessive pronoun, as in (22).

¹⁰ Note that a contrastive reading with 1PL possessive pronouns without a consanguineous interpretation is possible in a context of (clearly non-consanguineous) role play among children, where contrastively used *ONZE* *mama* ‘our mother’ would be fine.

‘the unique individual who is in the relation expressed
by the kinship term with a plural entity that includes
the speaker’

Above, we have adopted the view, based on Booij’s (2002) work, that constructional idioms have a non-compositional meaning component. This does not seem to be the case for the data in (19). Nevertheless, we have good arguments, i.e. the incompatibility with adjectival modification and contrastive stress, to treat the data in (18) in the same way as the constructional idiom *ons* + proper name. We would therefore like to clarify at this point what we mean if we use the notion of ‘constructional idiom’. We take constructional idioms to be fixed expressions with a variable part. Put differently, a constructional idiom is a combination of words, part of which is variable, that is stored in the lexicon with its meaning. In syntax, constructional idioms are therefore used as an atomic unit. Since the meaning of a constructional idiom is stored in the lexicon as one of its properties, it can be non-compositional, as was the case with *ons* + proper name. However, this is not necessary. Nothing prevents the meaning of the constructional idiom to be the same as the compositional meaning of its parts. Non-compositional meaning is therefore not a necessary property of constructional idioms. Since non-compositional meaning is incompatible with expressions built by syntax, non-compositionality remains a sufficient property to identify a constructional idiom. However, to identify nominal constructional idioms that do not have this property, other tests need to be used. Two properties can be used in this respect: the impossibility of (productive) adjectival modification of elements that normally can be modified by an adjective

and the impossibility to contrastively stress parts of an expression that in other context can be contrastively stressed. We will now show that these tests enable us to identify yet another constructional idiom in Standard Dutch.

4. Dutch complex prenominal -s possessors

As discussed in the introduction, there is another Dutch possessive construction that is incompatible with adjectival modification. In Standard Dutch, the kinship term that forms a complex prenominal s-possessors with the 1P singular possessive pronoun cannot be productively modified by an adjective, as shown in (4) above, repeated here in (24).¹¹

- (24) Mijn (*oude) vader-s fiets [Standard Dutch]
 My old father-POSS bike
 ‘my old father’s bike’ (= (4))

Above we have argued that such an incompatibility with adjectival modification indicates that a noun is part of a constructional idiom. (24) therefore suggests that *mijn vaders* ‘my father’s’ is also a manifestation of a constructional idiom. If

¹¹ Some speakers, including one of the reviewers, report that, although it is still considerably degraded, (24) is not as bad as (i), in which the possessive pronoun has been replaced with the definite article.

(i) * de oude vader-s fiets
 the old father-POSS bike

Other speakers reported that they find (i) and (24) equally bad. We currently have no explication for this variation.

somebody-POSS bike

‘somebody’s bike’

Prenominal –s possessors are not the only way to express adnominal possession in Dutch, but it is the only construction that displays a head restriction. Dutch has two other adnominal possessive constructions. The first of these also involves a prenominal possessor. The possessor is, however, not marked by the –s suffix. Instead, it is doubled by a possessive pronoun, as in (29a). This strategy is also known as ‘possessor doubling’ (see Grohmann & Haegeman 2003; Georgi & Salzmann 2011; Schoorlemmer 2012 for a discussion of similar cases in Norwegian and German). The second of these additional strategies is to express the possessor postnominally through means of a *van*-PP, as in (29b).

- (29) a. Jan **z’n** fiets (possessor doubling)
 Jan his bike
- b. De fiets **van** Jan (prepositional)
 The bike of Jan
 ‘Jan’s bike’

Unlike prenominal –s possessors, the possessor in possessor doubling and *van*-PPs does not need to be a head, but can also be an XP, as shown in (30).

- (30) a. [de nieuwe leraar] z’n fiets [Standard Dutch]
 the new teacher his bike
- b. de fiets van [de nieuwe leraar]

the bike of the new teacher

‘the new teacher’s bike’

Broekhuis & den Dikken (2012: 837-838) note that there seems to be a curious exception to the head restriction on prenominal –s possessors. Kinship terms introduced by a 1P singular possessive pronoun readily occur as an –s possessor in Standard Dutch, as in (31).¹³

- (31) Mijn vader-**s** fiets [Standard Dutch]
 My father-POSS bike
 ‘my father’s bike’

(31) seems to involve a phrase as prenominal –s possessor. Although left undiscussed by Broekhuis & Den Dikken (2012), the obvious question that arises is whether exceptions to the head restriction are limited to kinship terms accompanied by a 1SG possessive pronoun or whether other combinations can also constitute a complex –s possessor.

The data in (32) and (33) below show that only the combination of a 1SG possessive pronoun and a kinship term can be a complex –s possessor. It is not possible to combine a non-kinship term, like *kapper* ‘hairstylist’ with a 1SG possessive pronoun, as shown in (32).

¹³ German displays a similar head restriction on prenominal –s possessors as Dutch. Fuß (2011: 38) shows that in some cases, German also exceptionally displays complex XP-possessors. Although he doesn’t observe it himself, all his examples are of the type in (31a): they involve a kinship term introduced by a 1SG singular possessive pronoun (see also Scott 2014: 285-293 who confirms, via corpus research, that only the 1SG possessive pronoun can occur in this construction). We take this to show that (some varieties of) German may display a similar pattern as Standard Dutch.

- (32) * Mijn kapper-**s** fiets [Standard Dutch]
 My hairdresser-POSS bike
 ‘my hairdresser’s bike’

It is also impossible to combine kinship terms with possessive pronouns other than 1SG. This is shown in (33a). A 2SG possessive pronoun is only marginally acceptable. A 3SG possessive pronoun leads to an even worse degradation. Finally, plural possessive pronouns lead to sharp unacceptability. (33b,c) show that there are no restrictions of a similar sort in the possessor doubling and prepositional strategies to express adnominal possession.

- (33) a. ? jouw/ *?zijn/ *jullie vader-**s** fiets (-s suffix)
 your.SG/ his/ your.PL father-POSS bike
 b. jouw/ zijn/ jullie vader z’n fiets (possessor doubling)
 your.SG/his/ your.PL father his bike
 c. De fiets van jouw/ zijn/ jullie vader (prepositional)
 the bike of your.SG/his/ your.PL father
 ‘your/his/our father’s bike’

The data in (32) and (33) confirm that only combinations of a 1SG possessive pronoun and a kinship term violate the head restriction.

Since these two observations demonstrate that we are dealing with a constructional idiom, we propose that these combinations of *mijn* ‘my’ and a kinship term are manifestations of the constructional idiom in (36).

- (36) Syntax: [_{DP} *mijn* Y] where Y = any kinship term
- Meaning: $\lambda x.[Y(x, \llbracket 1SG \rrbracket)]$
- ‘the unique individual who is in the relation with the
 speaker that is expressed by the kinship term’

In the case of (34a), the variable part Y of the constructional idiom is filled in by the kinship term *moeder* ‘mother’ prior to insertion in the syntax. Consequently, the two-word combination *mijn mother* will enter the syntax as an atomic unit, i.e. a head. It can therefore freely combine with the possessive –s suffix without violating the head restriction. In this way, there are no real violations to the syntactic head restriction on prenominal possessors in Dutch. The only case that looks like one is a multiword expression that is formed in the lexicon, not in syntax. In this way, the apparent exception to the head restriction, and the bans on contrastive stress and adjectival modification receive a unified account.

Note that the meaning of the constructional idiom in (36) is fully compositional. It is the same as if *mijn* ‘my’ and the kinship term were combined in the syntax. It is therefore, just like the *ons* ‘our’ + *kinship term* combinations discussed above, another illustration that non-compositional meaning is not a necessary property of a constructional idiom.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we took a closer look at rather exceptional uses of possessive pronouns in varieties of Dutch. First, we examined the use of *ons* + proper name/ and other dialectal varieties of Dutch. We also investigated the use of *mijn* 'my' + kinship term as a prenominal *s*-possessor in standard Dutch. The first case is exceptional because the possessive pronoun *ons* 'our' conveys a consanguinity relation in addition to its 1PL features. The second case was unusual in that the *-s* possessors appears to be a phrase, while phrasal *-s* possessors are banned in all other contexts.

We proposed that both of these cases were instances of constructional idioms. This proposal successfully accounts for the ban on productive adjectival modification and contrastive stress that characterizes these constructions. In addition, it offers an explanation for the non-compositional meaning component of consanguinity in the case of the *ons* + proper name construction. For the prenominal *-s* possessors consisting of *mijn* 'my' and a kinship term, this proposal offered an account for why this is the only case in which something that looks phrasal acts as a prenominal *-s* possessor: although it is a multi-word expression it is syntactically atomic.

We also discovered that the same dialects that feature the *ons* 'our' + proper name construction also have combinations of *ons* 'our' and a kinship term that feature the same ban on modification and contrastive stress as the other two

constructions. We therefore concluded that these are also manifestations of a constructional idiom.

Central to the discussion in this paper was the notion of constructional idiom, a multiword lexical expression with a variable part. We have argued that non-compositional meaning is not a necessary property of constructional idioms. We have also proposed that a ban on modification of otherwise modifiable elements and a ban on receiving contrastive stress for elements that are generally compatible with this kind of stress indicate that we are dealing with a constructional idiom. These bans can thus be used as diagnostics for a constructional idiom. A wider use of these diagnostics and other tests would help to determine the exact boundary between the lexical and the syntactic component of the grammar, an issue that deserves more detailed research.

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